

From: William Richter
To: Microsoft ATR
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Subject: Microsoft Anti-trust

I have been following with interest the current proceedings in the Microsoft Anti-trust trial. While I admit that Microsoft has for the most part, a positive influence in the computer industry over the past two decades, their actions over the past few years have begun to bother me. While I am concerned somewhat about their marketing techniques, which allow them to maintain their operating systems monopoly, I am concerned that the lack of competition is stifling the computer industry in producing solid, stable and secure products.

I have used Microsoft products for years, first with DOS and later with Windows. With each new version, I have heard that this version is more stable than the last. I am a technical user who is always working with my system, installing and removing software. On the older Windows 95/98 platforms, I normally rebuild my systems twice a year when they become unstable. Even with the newer Windows 2000 professional, I still rebuild every eleven to twelve months. Each rebuild costs me at least a day to reload and install software and patches. I also use Linux based systems on a similar basis and do not run into this type of problem at all. I have had Linux systems run for years without the slightest instability. I understand that operating systems are not perfect and have defects. However, Linux has incentive to fix its problems.

Security is also another issue that concerns me. As part of my job, I maintain our organization's anti-virus software. Because of the constant influx of new viruses, this software must be maintained in on a constant basis. Even with constant attention, the release of a new virus can stop the Internet cold until the infected systems are found and disinfected. Looking at the source of the infection, we find that the majority of viruses are caused by defects in Microsoft. Many defects have not been caught though several versions of the products. The damages to a single virus can run into ten to hundreds of millions in damage. This damage is harmful to the industry as a whole and to our national infrastructure because the frailty of the software.

Microsoft has now announced that they will make security a top concern. This comes after major issues with XP that have even gotten the FBI involved. From my long experience with technology, I know that fixing the problem will not be as easy as Microsoft wishes us to believe. As with any design, the further along in the design process, the harder it is to make fixes. After the implementation, the cost becomes prohibitive. Meaning, we might not see a secure version of Windows until the next release, several years from now. I am sure Microsoft were more concerned with pushing Windows XP out the door before the court had a chance to review their latest product. However, this is a bad practice which puts their personal interests above the country's.

The question becomes, what is wrong with the settlement as it now stands. First, the settlement does nothing to address Microsoft's ability to maintain its monopoly in the operating system market. This is bad because Microsoft claims that it innovates its products in response to market needs. However, with no competition Microsoft has grown complacent. Other operating systems such as Linux and OpenBSD have already addressed the security and stability issues plaguing Microsoft products. However, because they do not hold market share large enough to threaten Microsoft, as would happen in a thriving open market, they have not responded to these innovations. In a way, Microsoft's plan for the future reminds me of the old USSR's planned economy. While this plan worked for a while, the lack of open market forces eventually doomed it.

I submit that to follow the current agreement put forth by the Microsoft and the Department of Justice is leading us down a path that has not worked in the past and is not healthy for our country or economy in the long run. A system which promotes healthy competition in the technology industry and does not allow one company to illegally maintain a strangle hold is needed to protect us from this future.

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